
Darlington Local Plan Examination

Hearing statement prepared on behalf of Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent Parish Council

Matter 10 Statement – Other strategic and development management policies 13 August 2021

1. Introduction and context

1.1 This statement has been prepared by Jo-Anne Garrick Ltd on behalf of Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent Parish Council (LCMPC) in response to the further supplementary questions contained within Inspector's Note No.13. It is informed by the most recent documents published by the council, namely:

- DBC19.1: Schedule of proposed main modifications – published 6 August 2021;
- DBC20: List of changes to the policies map – published 6 August 2021;
- DBC21: Revised policies map – published 6 August 2021;
- DBC22: Revised version of the local plan – published 6 August 2021; and
- DBC23: Revised version of the local plan (track changes) – published 9 August 2021.

2. Response to the Inspector's further supplementary questions

Policy ENV3(A): Rural gaps (APFSQ7)

2.1 LC&MPC is disappointed that the modifications proposed by the council fail to refer to the rural gap between Darlington and the rural villages Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent. As previously explained, this approach is clearly contrary to the vision of the plan which is that Darlington will have "*maintained its identity as a cohesive historic market town situated amongst countryside and villages...*". Without this rural gap, there is a significant risk that the villages will be consumed by the conurbation and that future development would not protect and enhance the landscape character, setting and identity of the area. Furthermore, it could risk the loss of connectivity of the green infrastructure network and associated biodiversity.

2.2 It is noted that the council has proposed modifications in relation to sites 41 (Coniscliffe Park) and 249 (Coniscliffe Park North). Whilst LC&MPC remain strongly opposed to the proposed allocations, it is considered that further amendments are necessary to make the plan sound.

2.3 The inclusion of reference to landscaping in criterion 'i' for site 41 (Coniscliffe Park) is supported in principle. However, it is submitted that in order for the policy to be sound, this should be amended as follows:

"Significant landscaping should be provided as part of the development of scheme, particularly on the western boundary with the adjoining Local Green Space (ref LGS14 Merrybent Community Woodland) and with the agricultural land to the north. This

should ensure a rural gap is maintained between the main urban area and the rural villages of Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent.”

- 2.4 Similarly, it is considered there is a need to strengthen the policy requirements for site 249. The councils proposed amendment merely moves the text from criterion ‘l’ to criterion ‘e’. In order for the policy to be sound, it is submitted that the wording of criterion ‘e’ should be modified as follows:
- “... A robust and significantly landscaped boundary would also be required along the western edge of the site to distinguish between the main urban area and surrounding countryside.”
- 2.5 LC&MPC do not consider it is necessary to attend the hearing session to present this statement.